

Message Text

SECRET

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TAGSXC PFOR, TS, US

SUBJECT: VISIT OF TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: A) STATE 046576

B) TUNIS 1302

1. TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, HABIB CHATTI, INFORMED ME TODAY, MARCH 11, THAT HE WISHED TO DISCUSS THREE TOPICS WITH THE SECRETARY: (A) MIDDLE EAST SITUATION: (B) PROPOSED VISIT TO THE U.S. OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA: AND (C) U.S.-TUNISIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS.

2. RE (A), HE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER AND HE BELIEVES THAT TUNISIA CAN PLAY A HELPFUL ROLE. WITH SATISFACTION HE COMMENTED THAT OTHER ARAB STATES, INCLUDING SYRIA, HAVE COME AROUND TO MODERATE AND REALISTIC POSITION WHICH TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT HAD ADOPTED MANY YEARS AGO. HE DID NOT INDICATE WHAT SPECIFIC ROLE HE FELT TUNISIA COULD PLAY. HE LEFT IMPRESSION HE WOULD REPORT TO SECRETARY ON HIS RECENT VISIT TO CAIRO, AS WELL AS ON HIS TALKS WITH ARAB LEADERS AT LAHORE CONFERENCE (SEPTTEL). HE, OF COURSE, WILL WISH TO BE BRIEFED BY SECRETARY ON STATUS OF NEGOTIATION EFFORTS.

3. RE (B), HE TOLD ME THAT HE HAD SEEN PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA EARLIER THIS MORNING AND HE FELT THAT THE PRESIDENT IS IN SECRET

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GOOD ENOUGH HEALTH TO UNDERTAKE TRIP TO U.S. NEVERTHELESS,

HE HOPED THAT BOURGUIBA'S SCHEDULE IN WASHINGTON COULD BE LIGHTENED TO TAKE HIS HEALTH INTO ACCOUNT. (I SAID THAT ONE VISIT IS SET UP, THIS COULD EASILY BE ARRANGED). CHATTI INDICATED BOURGUIBA WOULD ALSO VISIT OTTAWA BUT THAT CHATTI, HAD STRONGLY URGED PRESIDENT AGAINST MAKING FURTHER FOREIGN VISITS AT THAT TIME.

4. RE (C), CHATTI COMMENTED THAT HE HAD LISTED TUNISIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS LAST TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION ONLY BECAUSE "THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS BETWEEN US.". HE SAID THAT HE SHARES PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S STRONG EMPHASIS ON CLOSE U.S.-TUNISIAN RELATIONSHIP AND HIS VISIT TO U.S., SHORTLY AFTER HAVING APPOINTED FOREIGN MINISTER, IS BASICALLY INTENDED TO REAFFIRM IMPORTANCE TUNISIA ATTACHES TO THIS ASSOCIATION. HE LOOKED FORWARD WITH KEEN ANTICIPATION TO OPPORTUNITY OF MEETING WITH SECRETARY.

5. CHATTI INDICATED HE PLANNED TO ARRIVE IN WASHINGTON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13 AND WOULD PLAN TO RETURN TO TUNISIA SATURDAY NOON. HE SUGGESTED FRIDAY FOR POSSIBLE DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER USG OFFICIALS. EXACT ETA AND FLIGHT INFORMATION WILL BE PROVIDED AS SOON AS AVAILABLE.

6. COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, CHATTI IS LOW KEY, BUT CAPABLE INDIVIDUAL. UNLIKE MASMOUDI, HE DOES NOT RPT NOT RAMBLE IN CONVERSATION, BUT ADDRESSES ISSUES DIRECTLY AND PRECISELY. HIS FRENCH IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND, AS IS HIS ARABIC. I RECOMMEND THAT DEPARTMENT ARRANGE MEETINGS FOR HIM WITH ASSISTANCE SECRETARY EASUM, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARIES ROSS AND BLAKE, AND WITH APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS IN P/M AND AID. WHILE CHATTI GAVE NO INDICATION OF AN INTENTION TO DISCUSS SPECIFIC BILATERAL MATTERS, SUCH AS ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE, I THINK IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR HIM TO HAVE AN UP-TO-DATE BRIEFING ON THESE SUBJECTS IN CONTEXT OF OVERALL LIMITATIONS ON U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

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